Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies

Volume 10, *Issue* 1 2009 *Article* 9

WASTE ISSUES

An Interview with Janice Radway

Loren Glass*

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Interview conducted by Loren Glass
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The Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies is pleased to present an interview of Janice Radway, Walter Dill Scott Professor of Communication and Professor of American Studies and Gender Studies at Northwestern University, by Loren Glass, Associate Professor of English at the University of Iowa. Their wide-ranging conversation moves from thoughts on the influence of Radway's Reading the Romance *on cultural studies to the future of literary studies as a discipline.*

Loren Glass: Let's start with *Reading the Romance* (1984), which is a book that has almost had its own career. You have reflected on it a number of times, sometimes skeptically about its methodology. I thought I would ask you for your thoughts both about its effect on your career, and also its effect on the overall field of what we now know as American Cultural Studies.

Janice Radway: In some ways I feel grateful to the book because it certainly, in a way, made my career, and gave me a lot of freedom to do or not do other stuff. [...] It has had an enormous impact on various fields. It continues to sell more copies every year. It's more than 21 years old. You would think the book would be dead, but it's not, which is interesting. I think it says something about the disciplines, even more than about the book. Certainly, it was part of a general interest in reading, reception, and the so-called consumption of popular culture. There are any number of books from other disciplines that do similar things—a lot of it associated with British Cultural Studies, [...] someone like Ien Ang in Communication Studies. What is interesting is that there are not similar ethnographies of readers, and the methodology has not been taken up in literary stud-

Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies 10/11 (Spring & Fall 2009)

ies. It is much more common to see ethnographies of audiences in cultural anthropology or even in sociology, and I think again it's because of the discipline. People in literary studies don't have the funding sources to underwrite that kind of fieldwork, they feel they don't have the training, and so they tend to be more text-oriented. In many ways, the reader orientation has been taken up more in historical studies of reading, so that in the history of the book, there is lots of work on historical readers and how historical readers may have made use of particular kinds of texts. Maybe that's because archival research for people within literature is closer because it's text based still. I don't know, but there are not that many books that you could point to in literary studies that take up the same methods.

LG: I have two follow-up questions to that: one is, how would you account for what would seem to be a shift to a focus on readers in literary studies, partly inaugurated by the publication of your book?, and two, how would you account for the counterintuitive fact that literary people are focusing on readers to whom they really do not have access [...] and neglecting to follow up on the methodology of your book when, after all, contemporary readers are alive and with us?

JR: First of all, I would say that it's not *Reading the Romance* that inaugurated an attention to the reader. I think *Reading the Romance* is a symptom of a shift toward the reader and I agree with you that there was a shift toward readers. I would generalize it and say there was a turn, post the moment of theory, toward an interest in the effects of texts. I think that's a product of what's called the linguistic turn, the moment of theory. Obviously that's a very complex moment with many different kinds of theories being pursued, but I think it's important to think of that moment of theory as a post-elite moment, both in Europe and the U.S. and elsewhere. That's part of the politics of the moment, and I think a good deal of that literary theory was bound up with questioning the way in which the category of the "literary" had been combined with traditional knowledge formations and so, hence, the canon questioning, or what was sometimes called canon busting, and attention to the way in which the literary discipline and the canon had been nationalist, heterosexual, based on gender hierarchies. Even in those studies that did not specifically take up the question of "real readers" and were oriented towards sociological, anthropological, and historical questions such as "How was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* read?"—there was that turn, and it was part of the politics of the moment, which was to think critically about the institution of literary studies, the institution of authorship, as you know well– and reading became part of that. So I see reader studies as part of a larger formation bound up with the desire to question the politics of the "literary," and it had to do also with the position of the critic, of the reader aligning him or herself with particular kinds of identity groups. So people were asking, "What would it mean to read like a woman?" [...] That was a really interesting question in the late 1970s. "What would it mean to read as an African American?" Those are all, in a sense, reader-based questions. They are about the efficacy of a text. So that's where I think the orientation towards reading and textual effects comes from.

LG: So on the one hand, we can see the turn to theory, the linguistic turn, identity politics, new social movements—all as part of one shift hinging on '68

or the late '60s. It seems also though that there are tensions between the theoretical focus on textual readings, much of which focuses on the literary text, and the new social movement, identity oriented criticism, and I wonder if, one, you felt that in the production and reception of *Reading the Romance*, and two, whether that accounts for some of the tensions in the form of your next book, *A Feeling for Books* (1997)? Personally, how have you tried to accommodate theoretical, more textually oriented stuff with ethnographic, politically oriented stuff and how do you see that playing out maybe more largely?

JR There were a range of criticisms of *Reading the Romance* as there were a range of criticisms of various kinds of identity-based forms of reading. Some of it was quite apt and raised important theoretical questions. One of the key questions was about the issue of representation and the way in which the critic identifies with the erased or subordinated group, and purports to read what that group thinks that it does, and also in a sense speak for that group. I think *Reading the Romance* is pretty careful about locating that particular group of readers, and tries *not* to speak for that group. It certainly attempts to take their female perspective seriously. That said, obviously there is a feminist discourse operating in which the critic reads what they say about their reading in a feminist framework, which was not so self-evident to me. It wasn't evident to me, even though I was quite conscious of that and even the ending of the book tries to draw a distinction between my feminist reading of what they are saying, and what they might say. It's aware of the difference. But as I had written about it later, I certainly was less aware of the way in which feminist discourse was produced in me in a way to use them to articulate a feminist identity, to create the idea of a feminist reader in opposition to the romance reader. So the performative aspect of *Reading the Romance* was doing something that I wasn't quite aware of. But I didn't come to fully understand that until much later. I had started on that awareness with some of the best reviews of it and thinking that through. Some of that appears in the preface to the second edition. And then there is an article I wrote later that does more of that. That article talks about the construction of subjectivity, etc. Now, I think the Book of the Month Club book was an effort to take into account the situatedness of the critic, and both to recognize where I was located and how I had been discursively produced by my class position and education and then to return to the Book of the Month Club as a way of engaging with a kind of past. But that's not how the project set out. What's interesting about these things was that I turned to the Book of the Month Club because I thought that I was going to do variable literacies. The article that I wrote after *Reading the Romance*, the first post-book article when you're asked to speak about the book and put it in a frame, wanted to explore the idea that there are different ways of reading. Because I hadn't been trained as a sociologist, and didn't know how to do random sampling and focus groups [...] except as already established groups, I thought, "How am I going to get at variable literacies?" It occurred to me that the Book of the Month Club might be a way to do that because it has a general interest list, it has existed for many years, and I thought that this might be a way to access cookbook readers, popular history

readers, literary readers. So that's how I got involved with the organization. It turned out that they had almost no information about their members. But the organization was interesting. Then I became quite captivated by the discourse of editors, the people working in New York, and its relationship to academic reading. So, the similarity and difference between the middle-brow intellectual and the academic intellectual then became interesting to me. So that's how it became autobiographical [...].

LG: It sounds like both of the books and your work generally is engaged with one basic split, between the academic critic and either popular culture or the informant group, or the class split within feminism, and I wonder whether you think that to a certain degree that is inevitable or whether that is recuperable or resolvable within the way we write texts. In a larger view, do you think since the publication of *Reading the Romance* that the academic approach to popular culture has developed and grown, or is it still informed by that basic class split?

JR: Certainly it's developed. I think that there is a tension to popular culture as a powerful historical force that's unquestioned now. It is now taken seriously and you don't have to demonstrate that it's worthy of intellectual analysis. But, I still do think that there is a split between academically trained readers—people who make their living making distinctions, people who are professionally trained to generate those divisions—and ordinary readers who read for pleasure. One of the most salutary developments has been the way in which people have been free to write about their pleasures as academics. Popular cultural work that takes the pleasure of that activity seriously and enables the individual to write books from a critical perspective and from a fan's perspective have been interesting. I think Patricia Rose's book was one of the first that I was aware of to do that—the skill with which she wove together her academic's voice trained at Yale with her fan's voice and perspective was excellent. So, there's more and more work like that. It will be interesting to see, of course, what happens to the university in the next 20 years. The role of digital culture will be crucial here. It remains to be seen if that divide between the academic reader and the ordinary reader will be sustained. My guess would be, maybe not. It will be interesting to see.

LG: I want to ask you about the fate of the university in all of this. But, I was also thinking as you were talking about the fate of the "literary." Although it's an extremely common term in book titles and in discourse, arguably it's become a less useful term, or even a term without a clear referent in English departments and literary studies.

JR: I think it's unsettled. [...] Certainly I think one could say that this new attention to the history of the book and the way in which the technology of the codex and the technology of the book has had a boom suddenly has to be the product of a historical moment where we are on the cusp of a new technology. We can turn our attention much more self-consciously and actually see the ways in which the developments that we are familiar with are the product of something that's called book culture—and that's because of digital culture and new media. Do I understand how that's going to play out in the next 25 years? I don't! There are lots of "end of book" arguments, there's a lot of popular think-

ing about the way in which the decline of book culture is upon us. It's hard to know. Obviously there's also a tremendous interest in book culture—the popularity of Amazon, Barnes and Nobles, Oprah. There is obviously a concomitant interest in reading. What does that mean for the "literary"? My guess is that disciplines are going to be in flux and that soon the notion of English as an identifiable discipline, if it's not already under erosion or even attack, is going to disappear as a foundation. I think what's going to happen is that the association between a certain kind of language and national phenomenon will be called into question as literature is recognized as a global category.

LG: Yet at the same time, English departments seem to be usually one of the biggest, if not the biggest, and one of the more powerful departments in the humanities on most university campuses. Is that just the inherent conservatism of the departmental structures or is English becoming a catch-all term for a bunch of other stuff?

JR: The best argument I have seen about that is still Evan Watkins' argument in *Work Time* (1989), which is that English as a discipline, despite the focus on literary study as the pinnacle, actually operates as a sort of sorting mechanism. English is the only subject that all students have to go through from the beginning of school on up through college. His argument is that this is basically a sorting and tracking mechanism. That's the function of English, and the "literary" is simply constructed as a very specialized, highly professionalized component of that. I think that's a pretty good explanation for why English departments are as powerful as they are. The service they perform for the university, I think, is bound up with the idea of the "literate" person obviously, and is still connected with the idea of the liberal-subject, the citizen-subject, you know, the thought of Matthew Arnold. Is that going to continue? I wonder—as universities are being pressured by state legislatures, they are under tremendous financial pressures. There's much discussion about corporatization and privatization and the way in which more and more research has to be underwritten by private corporations. What impact is that going to have on the relative power of the disciplines against each other? The sciences, because of the role of intellectual property, can generate financially profitable intellectual commodities. As a consequence, universities see it as a viable option to put money into the sciences because those sciences are going to generate intellectual properties, which then generate funding. What's going to happen to the humanities is anybody's guess. It's hard to know.

LG: [...] Our comments here about the university and about publishing both flirt with the very common and compelling declension narrative about what's happening to literary culture, to the humanities, and to the world, and as we discussed earlier your books tend to provisionally step back from that and resist that narrative, which is respectable and laudatory. But it is hard to come up with another narrative, unless you want to be sort of Pollyanna—naïve and optimistic—or just humbly uncertain about where we are headed. But what can you say about those two closely related developments—one, the incorporation of publishing, the swallowing-up of publishing into large media corporations with which

you conclude *A Feeling for Books*, and two, the incorporation of the university which you are now increasingly involved with as Director of the Program in Literature?

JR: You know, the declension narrative is something I have always worried about. I still worry about it, and am constitutionally unable to be wholly persuaded by it [laughs]. I am still trying to escape from that narrative. It does become more and more tempting to submit because of the power of centralization, and the relatively few, probably five, maybe even three, mega-conglomerates that now control a huge measure of the globe's cultural production. So, it is very worrisome, and it's easy to become pessimistic. And, of course, it's easy to be pessimistic about the university because of the political pressures internal to the United States as well as global pressures and other financial pressures. And they are obviously in some way related. Exactly how, that remains to be seen. Part of the reason I would cite now for resisting the declension narrative is that it assumes that it understands the trajectory of the future. That seems to me to be a mistake because all discourses and social formations are enabling at the same time they are losing. I think the declension narrative forgets the fact that even though we see that we are losing certain things that are familiar to us, other activities, formations, etc. are being enabled, and it's not always easy to understand what's being enabled at the moment that it's happening, because lots of lacunae are being developed by things. The web appears, you have ideologies of information that want to be free, the way in which the web is enabling all kinds of political mobilizing. Now, many people are stepping back from that and recognizing the way in which the web is deeply bound up with capitalism—there is an assessment of that. But, how it's going to be used is anybody's guess, because all these things are happening at the same time. So, it seems to me, especially with the speed of change being so rapid, that in some ways it may require a different positioning of the critic. The critic may not be able to take up the position of the disinterested observer, which is bound up with a particular episteme, bound up with a particular epistemological and discursive regime. We may have to find a mode and a form of knowledge production that doesn't assume that kind of distance—that [instead] assumes immersion, that assumes that knowledge is to produce change, that knowledge is to be immersed. What that's going to look like, I don't know.

LG: Is Cultural Studies a gesture towards that knowledge? There have been some people who have actually aligned Cultural Studies with the corporatization of the university, and said that in some ways it unwillingly produces knowledge that is complicit with that. Certainly in its conception, cultural studies saw itself as producing precisely that kind of engaged critic. So where does cultural studies, specifically in the United States, but also increasingly on the international level, fit into that need or that positioning which both gets us out of the declension narrative, but also maybe presents some hope and vision for the humanities to replace literary studies?

JR: That's a really big question. I think both things have happened. Cultural Studies has been in some ways oppositional, but then as it was taken up, particularly in the United States, as a kind of textualism [...] and I think that is complicit

with the corporatization of the university. It is troublesome, though it doesn't mean that such scholarship does not also generate knowledge that can be used otherwise. But I do think that Cultural Studies attempts to think knowledge production at other sites, and attempts to understand how knowledge produced at alternate sites can speak back to the Western critic, the academically produced critic, and that's the most useful thing. To do that well though requires a different politics, a different critical position; it requires collaboration, cross-cultural and cross-discursive conversation—those things are really difficult. So, there is a lot of work—on transnationalism, on globalization, and on the desire to speak across continental, linguistic, and class divisions and those seem to me to be the most interesting. Can the university deal with that? I don't know.

LG: As you were speaking, I was thinking that there has been a shift over the past few decades over the sense of what the Cultural Studies critic can or should do, because it began with a sense that precisely the disinterested critical approach to popular cultural forms is what we should disseminate as teachers. Maybe I could shift to that question—we have been talking mostly about Cultural Studies as a mode of knowledge production, and as a new form of research and writing. I am compelled by Watkins' argument too, but in a funny way it is weirdly content-indifferent. It makes it seem like no matter what English departments are teaching, what they are really doing is sorting. But when you start bringing Cultural Studies into the classroom on a pedagogical level, which I know you have done at Duke, are we still just giving them cultural capital in a different guise or are we teaching them something different? I like to think that we are teaching them to be more attuned to their popular cultural environment, and indeed to read it critically, in what maybe somewhat old-fashioned ways. There may be ways in which those older critical models need not be entirely dispensed with. Maybe there is a question here about these ideas of immersion and pleasure, which I agree with you are welcome changes—but do we want to throw the baby out with the bath water? Isn't there still some work that old-fashioned close reading, ideology critique-?

JR: Yes, but the idea that critique inoculates one somehow from the blandishments of popular culture, I worry that that is not the case. In undergraduate seminars, your students already have a quite ironic and distant relationship to popular culture, and even to the ads that they see day in and day out. They already know how, and have absorbed in some ways, that critical position. You can tap into that and give them a language coming out of the traditional critique [...]. You give them that language—does that immunize them from the effects of consumer culture? I don't see that it does. It certainly hasn't for me. I've explored this in classes—as a feminist critic I can deconstruct women's magazines of various sorts—house magazines, fashion magazines. I still like to read them, and I still assume that they have a certain kind of impact. So, I am not wholly convinced that critique does immunize you from the effects of consumer culture. So, I wonder increasingly if that's enough, or what we have to do is somehow to wrest back, and this goes back to Marxism, concerns of production and get them to think critically about what they are losing by only being consumers of a cer-

tain sort. I feel very unsure in the face of these changes. But I do worry that the idea that knowing how something works disrupts that—I just think that's too easy a conception.

LG: You mentioned both feminism and Marxism [...] and it sounds to me like you are saying that they still do tell us how these things are affecting us. They just don't stop the effect. I want to shift a little within Cultural Studies and the strands within Cultural Studies in which you've worked. I know your new project is going to be more focused on gender. Where is the specific place of feminism in all of this now?

JR: One of the things that interests me about the subject of girls and women is precisely their complicated relationship to feminism, and the ways in which they are or are not willing to take up the subject of feminism. I am very interested in the tension between so-called third-wave feminism and second-wave feminism. I have been taught a lot about this by the students I have had. They really know more about this than I do. I am intrigued by the way in which the discursive turn in feminism is repudiated, taken up, by different groups, audiences, etc. So what I want to look at is the contemporary life of the term "feminism," and the ways in which that discourse has enabled certain things, has limited certain things. I am especially interested in the discourse of riot grrls and the way in which they see what they are doing as a certain kind of feminism. All these texts of third-wave feminism—various kinds of feminism that some second-wavers wouldn't recognize as feminist because it is aligned with a certain kind of consumerism, aligned with a certain kind of interesting fashion, whatever. That seems to me to be my object; because that does not recognize the way a historical moment is changing. So how do you engage in dialogue between people who formulated in one historical moment where one set of assumptions were given and people who came later in a different historical moment whose sets of assumptions are very different? How do they engage in a dialogue? So I don't actually think feminism is dead. I think feminism has enabled a lot for certain kinds of women. The general popular discourse by the media is a controlling discourse that has a lot invested in trying to suppress and erase. That's why I think I am again turning to the question of gender. But I am also interested—as much work in feminist circles has been tempted to do—to try and think without gender, to think about subjectivity and think of engendering as a form of disciplining, and to try and hone in on moments and processes whereby gender is fluid, resisted, and not reified. That's what seems very interesting to me.

LG: I want to ask you about the term "subjectivity" because that's come up in our conversations before, and it seems increasingly to be a term you are focusing on in your new work. But before I ask that, it does also seem that in answering the last question you brought up another interesting split in Cultural Studies work that you haven't worked on a lot before, but which was very central to the work of British Cultural Studies—which is the generational split, and the interest in youth. I wondered whether in your new project—your work on third-wave feminism—is the main demographic split generational, or are there other qualifiers for the folks who are characterizing themselves in the third-wave?

JR: I think there the generational thing is significant. I think the focus on generations for third-wavers is incredibly important, and I think that's part of the reason that what they do is often not recognized as feminist. Because feminism—and I am not the person saying this, other people have said this in scholarship—second-wave feminism was essentially for older, middle-class white women. There was not an interest in generational issues. They were interested in questions of reproduction, of employment—primarily safety. Issues relating to young women or older women were relatively off the charts. The assumption was that the kind of folks who are interested in feminism would be defining terms for those groups of women. I think what the third-wavers have begun to point out is that their generation is constructed quite differently, and I think that has a lot to do obviously with the political and economic situation and the ways in which certain kinds of possibilities have opened up for people which were not there earlier. They are thrown into this generational thing. You have to think about the relationship of generation to gender, to politics, to race, and obviously to class. Youth culture—I think Cultural Studies was very prescient about this. The whole question of youth is a very interesting one, and in some ways maybe "youth" might not be the right moniker—like reification—because it may be that the organization of subjectivity post-1965, post-1973–What periodization would you give it? There are various ways in which you could go. But it may be that the life cycle is under change and flux, and what got called youth culture was the first effort to name a new periodization in the life cycle. Youth now extends for many people much later. There's pressure by the economic formation to marry later, to stay single, because jobs are not permanent, because there's not the same kinds of ways to underwrite the bourgeois family structure. In other words, that category may actually be misnamed. We may be talking about some other formulation. For now, it's still called "youth." If you think about something like *Sex and the City*, and the whole category of 20-somethings and 30-somethings—it's a different formation because of the singleness, because of the role of urban and cosmopolitan environments. I don't know enough about this yet to talk about it in detail. But these are the types of things I have been thinking about.

LG: [...] Your working title is "Girls, Zines, and the Miscellaneous Production of Subjectivity in an Age of Unceasing Circulation." Are some of these terms, in particular subjectivity, meant to fill a place for a sort of person status that we don't have a word for yet? One of the common ways that the focus on youth is understood is because the sixties was a youth-based social movement, and of course Cultural Studies scholars were formed by the sixties. So there is a sense in which their focus on youth subcultures was a utopian investment in a period in their own lives. So, without being able to have a word for it, what are some of the shapes and qualities of this mode of subjectivity that you are formulating?

JR: It occurs to me that it is a form of subjectivity that is not defined by work—not defined by a trajectory necessarily toward some kind of bourgeois family structure. I think there is a tremendous emphasis on the "family" right now. I think of that as residual, a stop-gap measure against changes that are occurring. You could take a show like *Sex and the City* or any number of sitcoms.

Sex and the City can be critiqued for being very conservative in terms of gender arrangements. But it seems to me that the force of that show, even though all of the writing is about the sexuality of those women and their relationship to men and the role of Mr. Big, in fact the day-to-day nature of that show is about friendship, about the relationship among those women. If you think about *Friends*, if you think about *Cheers*, if you think about all of those shows that seem to me to be trying to capture something about the social formation where people's lives are not being defined by this trajectory of the generational move through family to children to old age and grandparent status—not being defined by their work, but rather being defined by pleasure, by various forms of consumption-based communities and formations, by friendship-based formations. That's just a hunch. But when I use the word subjectivity, it's an effort to capture the process of social group formation in process—what is it that's being created here?

LG: The concept of friendship seems very provocative and interesting here. I have been doing work on the Beats and bohemians as different models of sociality and community formation. There are two things that have struck me about that. One is the persistence of a certain gender exclusivity frequently in those kinds of social formations. Also, the degree to which many people felt one of the failures of the sixties was to actually successfully revise the couple family form. Free love didn't work very well, communes didn't last very long; we have utopian visions of friendship communities, but we can't seem to have a very good socio-economic basis for them. But it seems to me that what you are saying is that there is in some ways a deeper socio-economic transformation happening, whereby there are actually people who are not envisioning or producing their lives along the conventional couple or monogamous reproduction route. Is that what you see happening?

JR: That's my surmise. Since I have just gotten involved in this project, I haven't attempted to look at the demographics, and be able to figure that out. I believe the marriage age is going up again—

LG: Certainly in the middle classes it must be—

JR: Yes, in the middle classes. So I would have to look at massive amounts of demographic data to talk about it intelligently or with any confidence. You would also have to consider what's happening in people's leisure lives, and the way in which consumption and leisure need to be differentiated, but they are allied. You want to think about those developments. Then you also have to think about what's happening with global production. One of the things is that with the globalization of production, there is extraordinary mobility, not just geographically, but also from job to job. It's very rare for anybody to expect to be able to be employed, not only by a single company, throughout his or her working life, but within a single profession. So the conditions of possibility for the kind of sociality that I am talking about with respect to friendship—there is a tension there because leisure culture is producing like-minded communities of affinity and affiliation but economic pressures that move people around, send them away, are perhaps working against that. So it's very difficult to say how these things are going to play out, but it seems to me important to think about those new forms of

sociality and sociability, and try to capture what is actually happening.

LG: To take a step back on this, what's the fate or status of reading in this new subjectivity? It occurs to me, if you take the end of your last book into working on zines, that there is a pressure on the concept of middlebrow reading as you look at it there. Certainly reading is still a word we can use, probably better than the "literary." What are the modes of reading which parallel these higher levels of mobility and different types of sociality? Do they involve a different kind of interior? Is it not the same type of private interior that we think of, say, in reading a novel? What are some of these qualifiers, or how would we describe these ways of reading?

JR: I don't think we have the language for that. I don't think we have yet understood that. Reading doesn't seem to be disappearing, but its form is changing. Think about the web—our students have a much greater facility, not just with the web, but with what's routinely called multitasking. My daughter and her friends can be surfing the web, IM-ing, talking on the cellphone, and studying—all at the same time. They say they are not distracted, and I sort of believe that. That's the way in which literacy, or what we think of as print literacy, is increasingly interpenetrated by visual work, aural work—so these distinctions cannot be quite separated. Reading, as we know it as a contemplative, single activity is probably going to be transformed again. If you think about the nineteenth century, and the way in which people talk about communal group reading in the family network—then we got solitary, single reading that comes about later. We may be at another shift where that kind of singular, contemplative reading—except for a very particular kind of class of people—is going to disappear. Even the nature of work in the academy—I don't know about you, but when my colleagues sit around and talk and complain, we talk about the fact that there is no longer the space to actually read a book, unless you are either on leave or have a reduced teaching load. Something has happened that the material and social conditions of possibility for what we might call "contemplation" have changed. What will happen to that?

LG: At the same time, there seems to be an almost embarrassing overproduction of books that one feels one should read. [Both laugh] I want to follow up on the project a little bit. I'd be interested to know who is most useful for you theoretically at this point. When you mentioned your daughter, I actually thought of Benjamin and his idea of distraction. Benjamin has been perennially popular in Cultural Studies, although not someone I have seen in your work as much. I wonder if this new project is along similar theoretical lines? What do you find useful as a precedent or methodology?

JR: I am very interested in people working in anthropology, who have been doing ethnographies of the local adoption and adaptation of mass culture. I am very interested in the work of Arjun Appadurai, Purnima Mankekar, Tom Bolster—people like that, who are thinking and attempting to get at the ways in which at particular international, global sites, mass culture as disseminated by these conglomerates is affecting local media production, use, and adaptation. So I continue to be interested in ethnographies. I am also interested in globalization

theories. I am particularly interested in Hardt and Negri right now, and some of the new work on sociality and sociability. So my plan is to begin doing some of that reading. I want to read Agamben. Benjamin is increasingly interesting to me. I am actually going back and re-reading Marx on reification and commodification. So it's going to move in that direction as well.

LG: Two questions to follow up on that. I'd like to hear a little more about where Marx figures into your work now, and particularly with Hardt and Negri about where Marx is figuring in the larger world of Cultural Studies and theory? But I also was interested in your comment when we were talking earlier that ethnography becomes harder when you start to break down your identity categories. So it's hard to do an ethnography of zines if you don't know how to identify the audience. I'm interested in the folks you mentioned—is then the only way we have geographic, in other words, local. You can always say that there is this local group of people who are making use of this in a particular way, as opposed to girls who are spread out everywhere. It doesn't seem like this work is going to be located geographically.

JR: Obviously, one way to deal with this is to deal with the question of the local and its relationship to the global—that certainly is the dominant way. I was at a conference last week run by the literature graduate students, and Purnima Mankekar was the plenary speaker. I was commenting at the end. It became clear to me as she was talking that she is interested in what I would call the "geopolitics" of reception, and I am interested in the "micropolitics" of reception. So really what I want to look at—I may have to start with the category of girl—but what immediately happens when I start to look at zines or when I look at even books written for girls is the way in which this category almost instantly dissolves, and is under, if not erasure, certainly under question. It's that process that I want to try and get at, the ways in which the categories that we use reify a social process. I think social process is more fluid and more open, and that our various reifications that are bound up with particular knowledge regimes and disciplines reify that. What I am trying to think is: how would you think social process in a way that you could always focus on change? I see that as the question that Hardt and Negri are posing, with their interest in multitude, and the ways in which immaterial production produces a "common," and that common—and here's where I am a little unsure—is a form of sociability that could have potentially interesting political effects. So it's an effort to try to track, understand, and facilitate those emergent forms of sociability without disciplining or reifying them.

LG: It sounds to me then that if we are going to develop a method and a vocabulary to talk about these new subjectivities that you are leaning towards, if it's coming from Hardt and Negri, then its ultimately coming from Marx and Deleuze?

JR: Right, but I want to think in terms of gender and generation-

LG: -which is not that present in their work, right?

JR: It's not that present in their work. Maybe this is because I am still stuck in a kind of liberal subjectivity, where the question of the individual still assumes centrality. But I keep asking myself—what would it mean if we could under-

stand the fluidity and flexibility with which kids interact and create, and didn't assume that all kids have to become boys and girls, but could foster the kind of creativity and fundamental skepticism that I see operative in kids and especially adolescents. It's that sort of question that I want to think. So that's a micropolitics. I want to think the relationship to Hardt and Negri because I feel one has to understand the global politics of all of that, and the ways in which the transformation of modes of production is having an impact on all of this. So, for example, kids are growing up in families that have a very different day-to-day texture and feel to them. Just take a simple thing like this—I remember reading an article last spring in *The New York Times*. It was on graduation and the ways in which college graduations for many kids bring together divorced families. There are these multiple and conflicted families there. If you think that half of marriages end in divorce, what are the impacts of those kinds of day-to-day lives? You could link that with various kinds of economic formations. So it's that kind of effort to think those things together. But I am attracted to what I call the micropolitics of subjectivity. I call it subjectivity, but it might be better to call it the micropolitics of sociality and sociability.

LG: Before we finish up, I want to ask you about your new position as the Director of the Program in Literature at Duke. What's your vision for that? That's been an extremely influential and prestigious program, and you are now at the helm. Where do you see it going under you, and what are your plans for it?

JR: I'd say the same thing I said earlier here. I don't have, and I don't think anybody has a confident sense of where literary criticism or critical theory is necessarily going. It seems to me that there are a number of discourses and a number of modes or trajectories of thought at least for the immediate future that are going to be significant. I think one has to deal with the question of new media and the digital. Both put pressure on the category of the literary. We are currently having discussions about if we want to hire someone in digital and new media technologies. Do we want someone who can also address the category of the literary, or do we want someone who comes from the more technological, scientific side which seems in some ways more closely related to the nature of that? How does that put pressure on the category of the literary? I think the whole question of globalization, and the politics of globalization and social movements is another form and obviously that's a strong component of the literature program. Michael Hardt's presence there is going to have a huge impact. There's also a set of discussions coming out of a different stream of critical theory—I am not party to these conversations. But certainly, there is a discussion around work about the intersection between the theological, the ethical, and the political. There is tremendous interest in the work of Agamben and Badiou. It seems to me that that question is increasingly going to be posed. Other than that, who can say? We had an exercise this year where we got to do a strategic plan, and there wasn't anyone in the room who was confident about predicting where things are going. So what literature has to do is to continue to be nimble, and continue to pry and discern potential trajectories, and move in those directions.

LG: Let me link that up to one more general question that maybe is a good

place to provisionally conclude. I have noticed the shift of focus on to ethics in a lot of contemporary theorists, and I wonder if that's a response to a turn to morals in the larger cultural realm, and whether that's a place where Cultural Studies or a program like literature, modest as its effects may be, has a role? In other words, is there a degree to which we need to elaborate a discourse of ethics that can come back to this pervasive moralism of the contemporary world?

JR: I think you are right. That is probably why that evolved. The question for me is whether this turn towards the ethical is a kind of conservative mechanism. Because I have not been involved and invested in that discussion, nor do I know enough about it to speak with any sort of authority, I will refrain from making detailed comments. Its interface with political discussions, in terms of history of the left, is going to be important. It does seem to me that we have to be able to address those conversations.

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